

**Power and Influence in Establishing Continuing
Professional Education: A Case Study**

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Abstract: Studying power and influence tactics and the contexts in which they are used in program planning can advance understanding of establishing continuing professional education (CPE) programs. Researchers (Caffarella, 2002; Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Yang, et al 1998) have primarily focused on power and influence tactics used by adult educators (Caffarella, 2002; Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Yang et al, 1998). This case focuses on identifying and measuring the power and influence tactics in the context of an organization deciding whether or not to establish a CPE program. The author uses the samples of positive and influences (Caffarella, 2002), and Power and Influence Tactics Scale (POINTS), (Yang, Cervero, Valentine, & Benson, 1998) to identify and measure the tactics that were used to ensure establishment of a CPE program. The findings lend support to the planning theory offered by Cervero and Wilson (1994) in that “planning practice is a social process of negotiating personal and organizational interests in contexts of structured power relations” (p. 253).

Background

This case involves a professional credentialing authority that manages professional state licensure. To protect identities the professional credentialing authority is referred to as the Midwest Board. A trend of establishing continuing professional education (CPE) programs for the profession regulated by the Midwest Board presently exists. Twenty-six states require CPE for the profession, and legislation is in place but not yet implemented in thirteen states, including the state where the Midwest Board is located. Legislation is also being considered in nine other states. Trends of this nature have been mainly driven by the threat of state governments to legislate CPE for various professions. Professions have responded by establishing CPE programs on their own, thus enabling professions to maintain a degree of control (Queeney & English, 1994).

States having CPE programs typically require professionals conducting business in their state to adhere to their CPE requirements, thus, giving rise to the issue of reciprocity. States requiring CPE typically recognize CPE from other nearby states, thereby, alleviating professionals from having to adhere to requirements of various states. Collectively, the threat of legislation and reciprocity provides an incentive for professions to establish CPE programs regardless of other purposes such as: updating learning, improving individuals and their practice, regulating professional practice, and solving problems (Cervero, 2000). Reciprocity and the threat of legislating CPE requirements set the stage for the Midwest Board to consider establishing a CPE program.

Method

Data was obtained through interviews with members of the board. It was the intent of the author to interview the Midwest Board executive director, who was independent of the decision-making and could provide the most unbiased account of the decision-making as could be expected, and one person in favor and one person not in favor of establishing a CPE program. The executive director suggested that the author interview the board president, who was in favor of establishing CPE, and an at large board member who was not in favor of establishing CPE. The author was able only to interview the executive director and an at-large board member. After several attempts, the author was unable to contact the board president.

The interviews were conducted separately by telephone on several occasions over an eight-week period. The data was interpreted by identifying common themes that emerged from the interviews. The author cites as limitations the number of people interviewed and the interpretation of data, absent data not provided that was favorable for establishing a CPE program. The interpretation of the data was then applied to the sample of positive and negative influences (Caffarella, 2002) and POINTS (Yang et al., 1998).

Inter-rater Reliability

Three doctoral student colleagues in workforce development and education at the Ohio State University were asked to review interview notes and provide feedback as to their interpretation of the decision-making process to ensure reliability. One responded agreeing with the interpretation of the data by stating that the board president did not allow a democratic decision making process to occur, but controlled the process to ensure establishment of a CPE program.

Description of the Case

In early 2002 the Midwest Board asked representatives from the Ohio State University to provide information about CPE. The representatives provided an overview of the CPE literature, and perspectives about CPE from professional associations, professional credentialing authorities, and participants of various CPE programs. The author subsequently studied the decision-making process of the board.

What was believed to be the beginning of the decision-making process about establishing a CPE program began when the board president volunteered to research information for consideration in establishing CPE for the profession. While board members knew that the board president believed that a CPE program should be established, they believed that the issue would be contemplated over time then a decision made. However, the president made efforts to expedite the establishment of the CPE program by providing information that was primarily in favor of establishing CPE. The information included the extent that other credentialing authorities had established CPE programs, a review of new programs, and an example of what he believed to be the exemplar program. The establishment of CPE was placed on the agendas of most board meetings for two years with little focus on the negative issues related to establishing CPE such as the relationship between CPE programs and increased competence, a variety of interests being promoted and how money can become a primary focus and how difficult learning is to measure.

Board members opposing the establishment of CPE were concerned about the need to and purpose of establishing a CPE program. Those who opposed establishing a CPE program to address reciprocity were concerned about the lack of uniformity in CPE programs from state-to-state (e.g. various mandatory requirements and delivery methods). The opposition also did not believe that CPE would support the mission of the board: to maintaining the health, safety and welfare of the public. In particular, violations of the mission are believed to be a lack of adherence to professional standards not lack of education. Stated differently, the board receives few complaints that education can resolve. However, the opposition acknowledged the current trend to establish CPE programs and that now the majority of the board is in favor of establishing CPE as it pertains to resolving the issue of reciprocity. Reciprocity is linked with economic interests for professionals who desire to work out of state.

In sum, the opposition believed little decision-making by the board occurred, but that the board was manipulated by the trends as used by the board president to pressure a decision in favor of establishing a CPE program. Certainly the forces that emerged were reciprocity and the potential that CPE could be legislated by the state. As of December 2002, the board had moved forward by making decisions on the criteria for the CPE program. (confidential interviews; Walter & Matt, 2002).

The Bases of Social Power

The roles we assume reflect our attitude toward people who we view as having particular power. Likewise, our attitudes and how we view others is based on the way we view ourselves. This observation explains more about the roles we assume by being influenced by others more than it explains persons actually exercising power. Power is not only based on the perception of people who are influenced, but in the context of the situation and social structure (French & Raven, 1959). The social structure of the Midwest Board affords the president particular bases of power: coercive and legitimate. Coercive power indicates power relinquished because of fear to conform. In addition to other aspects, legitimate power is acceptance of the social structure, thus, in this case the structure or hierarchy of the board (French & Raven, 1959). If it were not for the social context, the power relationships would be different. Persons involved in program planning should be cognizant of the bases of power and that they are the bases of the power and influence tactics used in program planning (Yang et al., 1998).

Findings

Program planning is conducted within a socially organized environment with people having different roles based on their place in the social environment (Cervero & Wilson, 1994). As in any planning situation, it was essential to understand who is at the program-planning table and their role “at and away from the planning table” (Caffarella, 2002, p. 27). Everyone at the planning table has particular interests. These interests and the social setting drives the power and influence tactics used during the planning process (Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Yang et al., 1998). In Table 1, the author listed various elements of influences used in program planning (Caffarella, 2002). Those highlighted indicate the influences used during this planning process.

First, the fact that the board president provided information about CPE in a particularly favorable manner, while using the trend of the profession to establish CPE programs, resolve reciprocity and prepare for the threat of legislation, influenced how the needs of the board were

shaped. In doing so, alternative views were disregarded, thus, setting the agenda of establishing a CPE program favorable to his personal, political and economic interests. Pressure was applied by regularly revisiting “the” plan during meetings over a two-year period that served to quieten opposing voices. Last, it is particularly important to draw attention to the positive influences used in program planning that were not used during this decision-making process. Opposing voices initially heard were quieted and alternative views not entertained, thus, eliminating a democratic process.

Table 1: Program Planning Elemental Influences

Decision-Making Elements	Sample of Positive Influences	Sample of Negative Influences
Shaping Needs	Ensure that all voices that need to be heard are included.	Apply pressure on planning teams in order to have them accept your version of what is needed , based on what you have to offer as a consultant and your connections to senior management
Setting Agendas	Consult with a number of divergent sources, and bring the alternative ideas to the planning table	Use a political agenda as a basis for an agenda setting that is popular, although not in the best interests of those being served
Determining Populations	Find funding sources so opportunities can be given to any community member to attend no matter what their income level	Choose the populations to be served totally on their ability to pay large program fees.
Making Decisions	Set norms with the planning group for decision making that ensures a democratic process	Suppress any differences of opinion and conflicts that arise among planning members
Allocating Resources	Provide for adequate staffing with excellent content and instructional skills.	Mandate that technology-based programming be used although the technical support is inadequate

Yang et al. (1998) developed POINTS for measuring power and influence tactics in program planning. The power and influence dimensions and associated items for POINTS are indicated in Table 2. By comparing the interpretation of the data obtained during interviews it was determined that the board president exercised influence using three dimensions to ensure establishment of the CPE program. The president reasoned that the issue of reciprocity required resolution by establishing a CPE program. Additionally, he reasoned that establishing a CPE program would mitigate the threat of legislation. His reasoning was supported by trends of establishing CPE in the profession. Using this information, he was able to argue his position logically and ensure establishment of a CPE program. The board was pressured by the insistence that a CPE program be established by continually placing CPE on board meeting agendas. This effort kept a personal agenda of establishing a CPE program in front of the board, until the issue was decided.

Although the board knew that the president supported establishing a CPE program, his “research” approach contributed to their belief that the issue would be contemplated over time.

Table 2. Dimensions and Associated Items in Power and Influence Tactics Scale

Dimensions	Associated Items
Reasoning	1. Convincing that your plan is viable. 2. Presenting facts, figures, and other data that support your plan. 3. Using logical arguments to gain support for your plan. 4. Demonstrating your competence in planning the program. 5. Showing the relationship between your plan and past practices of your organization
Consulting	6. Asking for suggestions about your plan. 7. Asking about any special concerns about your plan. 8. Indicating your willingness to modify your plan based on input. 9. Indicating that you are receptive to ideas about your plan.
Appealing	10. Saying that someone is the most qualified individual for a task that you want done. 11. Waiting until someone is in a receptive mood before making a request. 12. Making someone feel good about you before making your request. 13. Making someone feel that what you want done is extremely important. 14. Appealing to someone's values in making a request.
Networking	15. Getting other people to help influence people. 16. Linking what you want someone to do with efforts made by influential people in the organization. 17. Obtaining support from other people before making a request of someone. 18. Asking other people in your organization to persuade someone to support your plan.
Bargaining	19. Promising to support future efforts by someone in return for his or her support. 20. Offering to do some work for someone in return for his or her support. 21. Offering to do a personal favor in return for someone's support. 22. Offering to speak favorably about someone to other people in return for his or her support.
Pressuring	23. Repeatedly reminding someone about things your want done. 24. Simply insisting that someone do what you want done. 25. Raising your voice when telling someone what you want done. 26. Challenging someone to do the work your way or to come up with a better plan. 27. Demanding that someone do the things you want done because of organizational rules and regulations.
Counteracting	28. Communicating your plan in an ambiguous way so that no one is ever quite clear about it. 29. Taking action while someone is absent so that he or she will not be included in the planning process. 30. Withholding information that someone needs unless he or she supports your plan. 31. Telling someone that you refuse to carry out those requests that you do not agree with.

Using this tactic, the president could be prepared to counteract any early opposition. Additionally, the president could counteract opposition from membership at-large by his actions of seeking feedback about establishing CPE, while actually making plans to establish a CPE program. Last, it is essential to point out the dimensions within POINTS that the president did not use: consulting, appealing, networking, and bargaining. Absent the use of these negotiation strategies, it is evident that the president used tactics believed to ensure establishment of a CPE program.

Conclusion

Unlike a case analyzing power and influence used by adult educators negotiating “program purpose, content, audience or format” (Yang & Cervero, 2001, p. 289), this case is an analysis of power and influence used by decision makers deciding whether or not to establish a CPE program. Interestingly, planning theory (Cervero & Wilson, 1994), and positive and negative influences (Caffarella, 2002) and power and influence tactics (Yang et al., 1998) apply. This case supports that power relations are primary in the education program that is born because it is the power relations that are primary in program establishment. Collectively, interests and the social environment construct the power relations. As demonstrated in this case, what can be viewed as the proactiveness on the part of the board president, serves to further personal interests by establishment of the CPE program.

The small power base in this case supported that few positive power and influence tactics be used in the decision-making process, however, the use of factual information in the form of reasoning, pressuring and counteracting was successful. It was essential that the type of interests coincided with the trends in the profession. Stated differently, the posture of the social environment supported the social activity that occurred and proved the power and influence tactics used worthwhile (Yang et al., 1998).

As revealed during the study, the establishment of the CPE program was not based on purposes typically associated with establishing CPE programs: updating learning, improving individuals and their practice, regulating professional practice or solving problems (Cervero, 2000), but for personal, political, economic reasons (i.e., reciprocity) and the threat of losing control (i.e., threat of legislative action). In short, if educational benefits are realized, they will likely be incidental. An interesting next step is to determine the type of CPE program established and what benefits, if any, have resulted.

References

References are available upon request.

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